



To: Burlington City Council
From: Burlington Sustainability Partnership (BSP)¹
Re: Burlington and the STAR Community Index
Date: November 16, 2014
cc: Mayor Miro Weinberger

Purpose:

- 1) Provide background information on the Burlington Sustainability Partnership (BSP) and the group's involvement in the STAR Communities Rating System; and
- 2) Garner City Council interest and support for this initiative.

The BSP: The Burlington Sustainability Partnership is a collaborative endeavor between the City of Burlington, the University of Vermont, University of Vermont Medical Center, Champlain College, the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Burlington Business Association, and the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission. The BSP was formed to create a structure for communication and collaboration, forward action and measurable results, and to tell a clear story about the group's joint commitment to sustainability. This includes celebrating Burlington's success and reputation as a sustainability community.

Burlington and Sustainability: Burlington is nationally recognized as a leader in sustainability, including work to support equity and diversity, livable wage jobs, the advancement and availability of housing for all residents, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and a community that fosters economic growth and development. This work has been driven by – and created – a plethora of quantitative and qualitative data sets. These data are reported in various plans and documents, including PlanBTV, the Climate Action Plan, the Region's ECOS plan, the Consolidated Housing Plan, and others. The BSP is interested in the potential of these and other data to demonstrate the collective impact of their organizations' work, measure progress towards achieving our collective goals, and to determine next steps the City and its partners should take. In order to help, the BSP is using STAR as an important first step.

¹ Representatives include, Joe Speidel and Gioia Thompson/UVM, Penrose Jackson & Jason Williams/UVM Medical Center, Christina Erickson/Champlain College, Katie Taylor/LCRCC, Kelly Devine/BBA, Charlie Baker/CCRPC, and Peter Owens/City of Burlington. Jennifer Green, Sustainability Coordinator, provides managerial and administrative support.

STAR (Sustainability Tools for Assessing and Rating Communities): Despite Burlington's portfolio of data and the importance of the data in driving and fostering positive change, Burlington, like most cities around the country, does not yet use the data systematically to demonstrate the collective impact of our key institutions and community partners. Nor does it evaluate progress against a standardized set of sustainability objectives and evaluation measures to drive decisions. To help, the BSP (with technical guidance and managerial support from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission) has joined the STAR Community Index Rating System. As a STAR Community, Burlington is able to amass our sustainability-related data in one central repository. With these data Burlington will be able to demonstrate collective impact, compare progress over time, and compare our progress with other STAR Communities. There are more than 60 STAR communities across the US, representing more than 40,000,000 people. Many of these STAR Communities are our "aspirational" peers including Portland, ME; Portland, OR; Chattanooga; Santa Monica; and Vancouver, BC.

As a STAR Community, Burlington is tracking progress in seven key areas: built environment; climate and energy; economy and jobs; education, arts and community; equity and empowerment; health and safety; and natural systems. Burlington's data collection is managed by the CCRPC and the Sustainability Coordinator, with support from a cadre of UVM interns.

In December, Burlington will submit its data for review by a third party for certification. STAR Community Ratings are awarded on a total cumulative score of points achieved. There are three certification levels: 5 STAR Community, 4 STAR Community, and 3 STAR Community. More than 20 communities have been certified. Thus far only two communities (Seattle and North Hampton, MA) have received 5 STARs. The majority have received 3 STARs, with eight communities receiving a 4 STAR rating. This includes Portland, OR; Austin, TX; and Tacoma, WA. Our preliminary assessment indicates that Burlington is on track to becoming a 4 STAR Community, although there is still much work to be done before the December submission date. Our STAR ranking will be available in February or March.

Conclusion and Next Steps: The STAR Community Rating System is a voluntary certification program used by dozens of cities across the US to evaluate progress against a set of standardized sustainability objectives and evaluation measures. As a STAR Community, Burlington is able to:

1. systematically gather our sustainability data in one, central location;
2. measure our progress over time;
3. help demonstrate the collective impact of the BSP and its members;
4. make data-driven policy and program decisions, and
5. gauge and compare ourselves with other aspirational cities.

The BSP will return to the City Council this winter with news of our STAR Certification, including how to market and celebrate Burlington's STAR rating and next steps.

For information on the BSP or the group's involvement in STAR, please contact Jennifer Green, Sustainability Coordinator, at 865-7532 or jgreen@burlingtonvt.gov.